

COMMENTARY

Table politics



Now that the political smoke has cleared for the moment — and only the moment — I want to point out that each of our presidential aspirants has really burned the meat.

But they're not the only failed cooks. In Lee County, elected officials haven't done a damn thing about the biggest question in most people's minds, either, which surprises me, since people like Ray Judah and Frank Mann are often out front of the crowd.

Here's what I mean. With only about 60 days left in the race for the presidency, nobody — not the national boys or the local ones — have raised the most overriding issue of the 21st century, here or abroad: EATING.

What's wrong with their advisors? Somebody should have chopped this problem from the larger body of offal issues we hear about over and over like a butcher chopping steaks from a cow carcass.

After all, eating is on everybody's mind all the time — all 6.3 billion of us on the planet.

Obama and McCain have done the environment, they've done the economy, they've done oil and war and race and sex and taxes and the past and the future, but they haven't done food.

Meanwhile, Judah, Mann and the rest of the locals haven't done food, either. They've done taxes, infrastructure, development, wetlands, parks, and population, but they haven't done food.

Why not? If you understand a nation's

food, you understand its heart. If you share a nation's food, you share its heart. The same is true of a county.

It's not true, by the way, that the quickest way to man's heart is through his stomach — anyone who thinks that doesn't understand geography, as somebody much wiser than I once pointed out.

But it is true that food is at the heart of things, for men, women and children, for the old and young, for the good guys and the bad guys, for the big and the little.

On the national level, both presidential candidates had a chance last week to pick a vice president capable of grilling the opposition on the one hand, or using his vast international experience to mix a harmonious melting pot of international interests and ambitions, on the other. But neither did.

What a mistake. Joe Biden from Delaware? All he knows, probably, is blue crabs. That ain't bad, but it ain't vice presidential.

And Sarah Palin? For God's sake, an Alaskan redneck. She probably eats polar bear livers or something, even though those pesky environmentalists put polar bears on the endangered species list, making it harder for her to drill oil in her home state, so her husband can run his snowmobile more.

Haven't these big wigs ever heard of the famous chef, author and traveling man, Anthony Bourdain? They missed a real opportunity in him. The guy looks good, he smiles nicely, he's a New Yorker — they talk a lot, which is important in international relations until you start dropping bombs — and he's available, as long as there's food involved. What a VP he'd be. And he has more real international experience than John McCain and Joe Biden put together — he'll actually sit down cross-legged with you and eat monkey brains, if that's what you do.

It's all about food, something our best presidents have known for 60 years. As

Harry Truman said, "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen," and he's been cited by both Obama and McCain as an inspiration.

Truman also said, "The buck stops here." What historians have failed to realize is that Truman did not mean the dollar, or even the euphemistic buck, known as the responsibility.

Truman was a literalist, and he meant the real buck — the male deer. No wonder historians now call him one of the greatest American presidents. Truman understood that eating is the issue, the big one, maybe the only real one, along with sex. And deer make wonderful food, from their lips to their tips. (Sex is nice, too.)

Which brings me to this conclusion: We need a president and vice president who can eat with the world. Not with the world's leaders, or in the world's most urbane restaurants — not solely. But somebody who can eat with the world. (By the way, I want the same representative spirit on the local level here in Lee County.)

We need somebody in the White House who doesn't mind chowing down on a big plate of giant waterbugs. We need somebody who can meet with nations opposed to our ambitions, and sigh with contentment when offered a plate of pickled snake heads, or borewors (pig or sheep intestine stuffed with off-cuts), or pig blood with scrambled eggs.

We need someone who can sit down for a Sunday dinner and start with squirrel brains (you gut the squirrel, cook it whole with the head on, then crack the skull and dish out the brains with a fork). We need someone who will eat sale in eastern Europe (pig fat ingested raw or smoked, boiled or fried), or nutria in Louisiana (big fat rat-like rodents). We need a scrapple lover who can bring scrapple to the table of issues (lips, snouts and organs cooked with cornmeal until it's gelatinous). We need somebody who can

relish barbecued dog, cat meat with steamed bread, horse sashimi and rice, bull penis in Asia one day and bull testicles (also known as prairie oysters or rocky mountain oysters) the next, in Colorado or Montana.

We need someone with brains — not just in his head, or hers, but on the table with the scrambled eggs (calf or sheep brains do well). We need someone who can fly into southeast Asia, sit down with the Asians and ask for a second helping of smoked bats (they look like skeletal brown mice, and they taste like jerky, some say).

And finally we need someone who can produce a White House cookbook that the president will sign and hand out as a special gift to dignitaries and ambassadors — something that includes not only hush puppies and fried catfish and apple pie, but roasted rat (you cook it whole and serve with hot chili sauce for breakfast in Thailand), mice stew, camel's feet with a zippy vinaigrette (this requires a young camel), seal flipper pie, deep-fried tarantulas, steaming gray silk worm grubs, roasted large ants served like peanuts in cups, or grasshoppers (known as chapulines, in Mexico).

And here in Lee County? Come on, Frank. What about it, Ray? Let's recycle, and enjoy some of our told-time favorites like baked stuffed raccoon, or armadillo in mustard sauce.

All you do is find an armadillo on the side of the road, clean it, slice it thin and marinate it for a day, and then add white wine, oil, garlic, butter, salt, pepper and herbs to a fry pan. You brown it, before covering and simmering for an hour or two. Then you mix in some cream and mustard, stick it back on the skillet for a final flourish, and serve to your voters.

Um-umm-ummm, that's some real table politics, boys, Lee County style. Let's take it national, and remember that all politics is local. ■

 **Edison**
NATIONAL BANK

 **Bank of the**
Islands

**Traditional service
with innovation.
Teamwork makes
it happen.**

— John Ammons, Vice President

— Leah Kirby, Vice President

Combining tradition with innovation is our strategy for providing exemplary customer service while constantly searching for "a better way" to provide all your banking needs.

Our customers enjoy the cost savings of **Free Checking**, **Free Online Banking** and **Free Bill Pay**, the convenience of an **expanded ATM Network**, and the unique value of **Health Savings Accounts**. These are a few examples of our innovative services.

Recognizing that convenience, innovation and value are also a priority for our **business clients**, we offer:

- ◆ **Courier Services**
- ◆ **Remote Deposit Banking**
- ◆ **Cash Management Services**
- ◆ **Merchant Services**

Experience the benefits of joining Edison National Bank and Bank of the Islands. We make banking about you.



13000 S. Cleveland Ave.
Fort Myers, FL 33907
239.466.1800

2105 First St.
Fort Myers, FL 33901
239.334.4668

1699 Periwinkle Way
Sanibel Island, FL 33957
239.472.7211